NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5547 FEBRUARY 23, 1978
FRED BROWN/NEW DELHI

KOIRALA TRIAL

ANNCR:

IN KATMANDU, THE LONG AWAITED TREASON TRIAL OF NEPAL'S FORMER PRIME MINISTER, B.P. KOIRALA, IS UNDERWAY. CORRESPONDENT FRED BROWN OF OUR SOUTH ASIA BUREAU HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT:

VOICE:

MISTER KOIRALA, NEPAL'S ONLY ELECTED PRIME MINISTER, WAS OUSTED IN NINETEEN SIXTY IN WHAT HAS BEEN CALLED A PALACE COUP. THE COUP WAS ENGINEERED BY KING MAHENDRA, FATHER OF THE PRESENT KING BIRENDRA, WHO RESENTED AND FEARED MISTER KOIRALA'S POPULARITY AND ACCUSED HIM OF PLOTTING TO DO AWAY WITH THE MONARCHY. SUDDENLY, AND WITHOUT WARNING, KING MAHENDRA DISOLVED PARLIAMENT, DISMISSED MISTER KOIRALA AND HAD THE PRIME MINISTER AND MEMBERS OF HIS CABINET ARRESTED.

MISTER KOIRALA REMAINED BEHIND BARS FOR SEVEN YEARS, UNTIL NINETEEN SIXTY-SEVEN WHEN HE WAS RELEASED AND WENT INTO EXILE IN INDIA. FROM THERE WITH THE HELP OF OTHER DISSIDENTS, HE CONTINUED HIS STRUGGLE AGAINST THE NEPALI GOVERNMENT UNTIL NINETEEN SEVENTY SIX. COMPLAINING AT THAT TIME THAT HE WAS MADE TO FEEL UNWELCOMED DURING THE EMERGENCY RULE OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER INDIRA GANDHI, MISTER KOIRALA RETURNED TO NEPAL. HE WAS IMMEDIATELY RE-ARRESTED ON CHARGES OF FORMENTING SEDITION. HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF MISTER KOIRALA'S CONTINUING POPULARITY AT HOME AND EXPRESSIONS OF SYMPATHY ON HIS BEHALF FROM ABROAD, THE GOVERNMENT DELAYED BRINGING HIM TO TRIAL.

MISTER KOIRALA'S TREASON TRIAL, WHICH OPENED MONDAY, IS BASED ON LEAFLETS AND STATEMENTS ALLEGEDLY MADE BY HIM ADVOCATING THE OVERTHROW OF THE GOVERNMENT, AND ON THE CONFESSION OF A CO-ACCUSED. THE TRIAL IS BEING CONDUCTED BY A ONE-MAN TRIBUNAL IN CAMERA -- THAT IS, WITH NEWSMEN AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC BARRED.

WHILE THE PROSECUTION IS REPORTED TO HAVE TOLD THE COURT IT HAS AMPLE EVIDENCE OF MISTER KOIRALA'S GUILT, MOST OBSERVERS EXPECT A SWIFT TRIAL -- ENDING IN A ROYAL PARDON AND MISTER KOIRALA'S SWIFT DISPATCH ABROAD FOR TREATMENT OF AN ARTERY DISEASE. HIS CONDITION IS REPORTED TO HAVE DETERIORATED MARKEDLY IN RECENT MONTH, AND THE GOVERNMENT IS SAID TO BE WORRIED THAT HE MIGHT DIE IN PRISON AND THEREBY BECOME A MARTYR.

JS/PY